



# OUR STORY

## NAŠA ZGODOVINA



Vol. 6 No. 3 Fall 2016

## Greatest Grandpa Ever

Tessa Vintar



I truly believe I am one of the luckiest girls to ever live, because the day I was born I was held in the hands of my soulmate. I did not have to look anywhere for him, because he was smiling down on me. As I lay brand new in his strong hands, I did not know that I was being held by the man who would teach me the feeling of unconditional love. I did not know the blessing of John Vintar being my grandpa, but over our twenty-five years together, I would.

It's difficult to put into words how I saw my grandpa, because when I think of him, my mind floods with memories. I wish I could convey the feeling I get when I think of him, but words are no match for the fullness in my heart and soul when I think of him. I remember his words of wisdom, the way he looked at me, his jokes and our laughing fits at the dinner table. We loved telling each other about who we bragged about each other to, and we did it so often that he proclaimed us to be the only members of our "mutual admiration society." One of the last things he said to me when I was cuddling him on his bed was "I am honoured by my granddaughter." I am no less honoured by him. He is the best man I have ever known, and will always be. I wouldn't trade those moments squeezing into the hospital bed beside him for any other moments on earth. No matter how we spent time together, we spent it in love.

Not only did my grandfather love me with all his heart, and I loved him with all of mine, he loved life. He loved the beauty of the earth, he loved God, he loved God's smallest creatures and biggest blessings. We were speaking on the phone one day and he told me some not particularly good news, but he dismissed it with his usual joyful, smiling voice and laugh, because life was good, the birds were singing, and the branches looked beautiful against the sky. He taught me gratefulness.

He makes me proud. I can talk about my Grandpa for hours if you let me. Sit me down with tea and I'll share all the stories he shared with me, about his life in Slovenia and the chicken that laid eggs on the bed, his childhood in Timmins as a young Slovenian immigrant, and how hard work and education are necessary preparation to "meet your destiny". I will tell you how much he loves his grandchildren, how when we were born, he had "accomplished everything," and how his eyes lit up before a joke. My pillar of strength, my support, my confidant, church partner, and soulmate. This is the John Vintar I know and love. This is my grandpa, whose place in my heart will be full forever with our memories, his example, and our love. I could not have asked for stronger hands to carry me or a stronger soul to care for me than those of John Vintar, truly the greatest grandpa ever.

# Hints for How to Write Your Life Story

## An Interview with Mr. Miloš Zajc.

Anne Urbančič

September in Canada always brings promises of fresh activities and a renewed energy. Once the long, hot days of floppy hats and sunscreen have meandered lazily into our memories, Canadian children put away their bathing suits, their Frisbees and skateboards and they turn to their pencils, books and laptops. What about adults?

Perhaps adults can also take an example from the kids. You'll likely turn your nose up at writing homework like the children, but what about writing your life story? This is what Emil (Miloš) Zajc of Toronto did not too long ago. And now he has a complete book to send to a publisher, a fascinating and unique story to pass on to his children and their children, and to all those who will, in the future, want to know about Canadian Slovenians.

Is it hard to do? I asked him about his project and discovered in my interview with him that a life story is always worth telling.

AU: *Why did you want to start this project?*

MZ: My two daughters, and especially my grandchildren, wanted to know about my past. I hope readers outside my family will be interested in comparing Canadian rules for refugee immigration of the immediate post war years to current ones. In 1951 I arrived in Canada by myself and was sent to work on the railways in Northern Alberta. My wife, Caterina, and our three year old daughter came only after I got established. I rented an apartment, paid in part for their train voyage and sent my wife \$50 for meals on the train. But let me add that the somewhat more rigid immigration rules of the post war years, made us, as newcomers, learn how to stand on our own two feet from the start, how to manage assimilation, how to confront adversities, and how to look for and accept any kind of job.

AU: *When and how did you start your book?*

MZ: I started three years ago; I didn't take any courses in memoir writing. Sometimes an event I described would trigger additional memories or revisions of other events already introduced. I added a couple of pages as a "Prologue".

Now and then I got sidetracked even if only indirectly. Why? For variety and as a change of pace for the readers' benefit, and an opportunity for them

to discover interesting pieces of information such as the background of the Italian song *Volare* which is connected with a painting by Marc Chagall, or why an Italian wine is called *Est, Est, Est*, or the origin of the name of the city of Ajax, Ontario, or of Medicine Hat, Alberta. At the end of each of the three sections of the memoir, there are photos related to persons and to events described in that part. I looked at these at times. Often I referred to my mother's numerous letters, all of them three or four pages long. They dealt with family, world events, books, music, and art. Occasionally, my daughters helped me remember events, but very rarely.

AU: *Did you have a set routine for writing?*

MZ: No set routine, really. It was pleasant and also at times painful to go back in memory to life events of the past. I used a computer but I would also scribble ideas in a copybook.

AU: *What advice would you give to others who are thinking about writing their own life story?*

MZ: On a beautiful clear night, look up into the sky and enjoy the brightness of the tremulous stars. Think back into your past, about those no longer with you, about some who made you happy, some who made you sad. Next morning, make a few notes, sit in front of your computer and start typing.....with my blessing, if needed.....

September holds many such clear nights that Miloš hopes will inspire your own memoir. Then, as your children and grandchildren are writing away, doing their homework, you can sit with them to provide them with a valuable account of your life as a Canadian Slovenian. Don't forget to send a copy to the Archives of the Canadian Slovenian Historical Association.



# The History of Slovenians in Canada between WW I and WW II

Jerry Ponikvar

Father Charles Ceglar had written and published a book about the Slovenians who had come to Canada after WWII. When I read it, it occurred to me that a part of Canadian Slovenian history was missing, and that was the immigration period between WWI and WWII. Out of interest, I contacted and met with Father Charles. We talked about the pre WWII Slovenians, most of whom had settled in northern Ontario and Quebec, while others had moved to farms in the Niagara region, and to western Canada. I suggested that it would be a good history to record as it was an important part of the story of Slovenian immigration to Canada. He agreed that it would be a wonderful idea and that he would enjoy being part of the research group. He then asked if I knew of others who would join us on the committee. I assured him that I knew of several others who would be a part of the study and join the research group. And so, the Research Committee was established. Members included John Vintar, Superintendent of Education, DPCDSB as president; Jerry Ponikvar, Superintendent of Education, TCDSB as secretary; Cecilia Mlinarič, Principal, HWCDSB as treasurer; John Zupančič, Director of Education, YRCDSB; Joe Vintar, Transportation Administrator, HWCDSB; and Father Charles Ceglar, St. Gregory Slovenian Parish.

The first meeting was convened in Hamilton at St. Gregory's rectory in the early 1980s. We met bi-monthly for almost one year to work on the questionnaire we would use to collect the information that would tell the story of each family - their village in Slovenia, how they travelled, why they came, conditions that they experienced, where they settled and why, experiences as new immigrants, how they were accepted, their employment, and other points of interest.

Next, we prepared a comprehensive list of Slovenians whom we would interview. We reached out to as many Slovenians as we could find for our research; some also came to us through contacts who heard about what we were doing. Cecilia Mlinarič was very helpful with her knowledge of Slovenians living in the southern Ontario area.

Over the next few years, we had collected a considerable amount of information. It was agreed that John Vintar would look after the filing and maintaining of information and photographs we had collected. We also found that some Slovenians who gave us information were concerned about the publication of what they said and wanted anonymity.

Now came the time to start formatting the organization of the publication and, of course, the funding of the printing process. Then with illness and committee members passing away, the project came to a halt. In about 1995, I had just retired and met up with John who was anxious to move forward with the writing of the book which he had started. It was at this time, that we joined the Board of Directors of KSK/CSC and recommended to them that the Congress take on the project. We needed their support to apply for a Trillium Grant. Funds were also provided by various Slovenian organizations and interested Slovenians in the southern Ontario area. John Vintar followed through and meticulously wrote the book (From Lipa to Maple).

Kudos to John Vintar for following through and bringing this important piece of Canadian Slovenian history between WWI and WWII to everyone's attention.

## A Tribute to John Vintar

Jerry Ponikvar

Yes, on August 1, 2016, we lost a wonderful friend. The "we" are the "Slo Boys" who meet every first Thursday at Montana's at highway 5 and the 403. The "Slo Boys" are a group of Slovenian guys who lived or grew up in northern Ontario and Quebec and whose fathers mainly worked in the mines. John Vintar was a founding member and the chosen head of our group. At each meeting, Slovenian was to be spoken, and we would bring our "slovars" (dictionaries) to help us out, or we would be prompted and helped out by other members of the group. However, we did turn to English during the course of our luncheon. Stories that we shared were about growing up in a Slovenian home in the midst of an Anglo-French community environment. We reminisced about our parents' expectations, the discipline, the picnics, the importance that our parents placed on education so that we would not have to work like our fathers did and so on. We always gave John a rough time when he tried to bring some semblance of order to the group. We will miss him, as he was a great and gentle friend to all of us, and we thank God for the fond memories we hold in our hearts.

John was also a valued and contributing member of KSK/CSC (Canadian Slovenian Congress) which was created after the declaration of independence by Slovenia. It was while he was a member that we obtained a Trillium Grant so that John was able to complete the writing of "From Lipa to Maple".

John was also a member of the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society since its inception. He truly believed in the importance of the Society, its archives and the maintaining of records of our Slovenian roots and heritage. He was an important contributing member of our Society. To John's wife, Terri, and his sons, Gregory, Alan, John and their families, we extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers.

## Summer Student 2016



*Andrea Davidson*

There is one door in the basement at Dom Lipa that, whenever opened, reveals three roomfuls of stories. Usually that door is kept locked, but this summer it was open almost every day for us two summer students working inside. The CSHS archives are full of books, newspapers, photographs, vinyl records, scrapbooks, artifacts, and other documents that tell stories of the experiences of Canadian Slovenians.

This summer, we created useful and accessible inventories of this impressive archival collection so that, in the future, Canadian Slovenians' stories will be remembered in both Canadian and Slovenian histories.

For me, the most interesting thing about this work was learning the variety of life stories and experiences that comprise Canadian Slovenian heritage. Second- and third-generation Canadian Slovenians may know their own family histories well enough, but those familiar stories seem to have an entirely different significance when contextualized among the many other Canadian Slovenian family histories that the CSHS archives preserves.

Having just completed my B.A. in English, History, and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto, I came to the CSHS archives with extensive research and archiving experience, but limited knowledge of my own Canadian Slovenian heritage. Since working on this summer job, however, I have learned a lot, and I am interested in learning even more.



*Katherine Sajovec*

My name is Katherine Sajovec and this is my second summer employed at the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society. Last year, I created content lists for documents in the Hollinger boxes and learned about the contributions Slovenians have made to Slovenia and Slovenian communities in Canada. This year, I had the opportunity to create inventory lists and begin keeping a detailed record of all the items in the archives. The inventory I was mostly responsible for was the library collection. The archive has over 1000 books that had to be catalogued, a task that took almost the entire summer. The books deal with a range of subjects and some are even antiques! Once the inventory was complete, Andrea and I were given the task to determine a fitting classification system so the books could easily be located and retrieved. We opted for the Dewey Decimal classification system as it is also used in the Hamilton Library at St. Gregory the Great. I also worked on an artifact inventory. There are many beautiful artifacts in the archives and I had the pleasure of photographing, cataloguing, and describing each one. My favourite is a replica of the Vače Situla, an Early Iron Age bronze vessel. While not Slovenian Canadian, it is a beautiful piece of work that is a part of our history. Unfortunately, this is my final summer working for the CSHS as a student; however, I intend to remain connected to the Society and help keep Slovenian history and contributions in Canada alive.

OUR STORY is published by:  
Canadian Slovenian Historical Society  
52 Neilson Drive,  
Toronto, ON M9C 1V7  
For more information contact:  
Frank Brenc  
Telephone: 416-281-6794  
E-mail: frankbrenc@rogers.com

### **In this issue:**

- Greatest Grandpa Ever
- Hints for How to Write Your Life Story
- The History of Slovenians in Canada Between WWi and WWII
- A Tribute to John Vintar
- Summer Students 2016

